

## **SARA FGAIER**

Q1Q: How would you describe home movies to a person who is not familiar with the concept?

Q1A: I think that each of us more or less have an idea what a home movie is, as they might have come in contact with the films done by parents. I think it represents something connected with collective memory that is after all not so different from photography. In this sense I think also about the texts of Annie Ernaux, I don't know if you have read her books, who speaks about home movies which she describes, but she works above all on photography. She chooses not to insert them directly in her book but there are several descriptions of them, of the places where these photographs have been taken and the people that appear. The strength of this book is how one can recognise himself in it, because there are things of her lived experience, moments and situations that each of us experiences; and these are always the same: ceremonies, weddings, celebrations, Christmas. It is also interesting to see how filmmakers prepare this recurrent series of events. I have found ingenious collections where each year for birthdays there was always the same situation where the number of candles was growing, the children were growing up, but somehow everything was remaining the same, identical, perfect. These are all scenes that in most cases are born in occasion of the birth of a son or a daughter.

Q2Q: Do you think that the public interested in home movies has changed over the past few years? If so, how?

Q2A: For sure the reuse of home movies is not yet so widespread. However there have been some major important works that have started to work on this. So I believe there is a certain attention for this material, also because we are in a historical time when safeguarding this heritage has become imminent, due to the fact that a generation has almost passed and most of these filmmakers are not alive anymore. So it is now or never that this material can be saved. The more time passes, the more difficult it becomes to recover this footage. The same situation will exist in a couple of years of digital formats before HD.

Q3Q: Which do you think are the best examples of reuse of home movies?

Q3A: This material, having an enormous potential possess this specific visual strength because they talk to all. (3 missing minutes – audio error. The main point that was made is about: the imaginative capacity of the home movie, which opens up endless possibilities of reuse belonging to different genres).

Q4Q: When and why did you start reusing home movies in your work?

Q4A: My first approach to archive material and home movies has been in the film 'the wolf 's mouth', where I managed the research and the editing. It was a very long research taking almost a year, mainly undertaken in the area of Genoa, inside the Ansaldo Foundation and looking for material on the industrial area. Then a little by chance, I found a DVD in a local market with material of some filmmakers of Genoa and discovered there was an association, a cine club; I wrote them a hand letter, thinking that no one will answer me, but the director of the cine club answered. I started taking part in their meetings held each Thursday evening where they projected their work and got to know them better, one by one, going in their homes and talking to them. It has been a very long

process, especially because it involved establishing a relationship of trust. As we were talking yesterday it is a difficult process, to go into people's homes without being backed-up by any institutions. With some of them there have been some initial issues, but once the trust was established there was full availability from their side. At that point a treasure emerged: all unpublished/exclusive material. Then in reality of this material there are in the entire movie only 7 minutes; they could seem longer due to their visual strength/power. Through this research a new archive of about 100 hours of amateur footage emerged. This material we have not digitalised to a great extent, because the experience of projecting it was so beautiful. This has been for me an amazing experience, of research and afterwards of editing and transforming this material.

Q5Q: Which are the difficult and which are the easy parts in the process of reusing home movie archives?

Q5A: It is essential to approach this material with extreme delicacy and respect, as it represents the private life of a person. It can be easy because some of these images possess an aesthetic beauty and it is difficult to include them in a story and render them functional to the final work, the film. Let's say that it happened to me to have complex situations, like the film I was talking about; I could choose from thousands of paths to undertake, because it was extremely fascinating but also very hard to put them into dialogue. It happened many times during my collaboration with Pietro Marcello, for example on the film *Bella e Perduta*, where there are few archival scenes, but nevertheless it was a harder job for the video editor, than that for a film that does not use archival material. Not that films that do not use archival footage are easy to edit. Taking as an example 'The Train goes to Moscow', the editing process was a huge one. The archive does not involve a process of filming scenes but it gives you very well defined material with a specific length, with which you need to work. Therefore many times the scenes start and finish the way there are recorded on film. This means you have no options so as an editor you need to invent things, artifices. You can have this limit, but it is at the same time a huge potential.

Q5Q: You have therefore an approach that looks both towards the potential of this material and the fear of what you cannot find in the archive.

Q5A: Yes and these are limitless choices. You find in your hands a film that has been recorded previously, or you go do your own recordings and you end up working on images that you thought have gone lost. It is clear that in the case of the archive this thing is huge so it can cause fear, but you also have limitless power. Also power over a different process, at least for me it always has been like this, where initially I approach to something that inspires me a lot; this can influence somehow also the recordings, a thing that you find, but I also found myself very free to move around huge research topics, in order to see exactly how the material was able to stimulate my imagination. While during the image elaboration process it happened to me very often to change direction and go find specific things. In the moment that I had already a grip on the film, I found myself with a very specific need; this is obviously the case where you need a specific thing, but it is also one that doesn't happen almost never in the beginning of the working process. Maybe this is also the difference; that often you need some shots, because they are useful to your purpose; while it is completely another thing to have a total open gaze of improvisation in relation to that which can happen. For me this latter position is very stimulating. It is also case-by-case, in doing editing work, some things happen but you can't even explain them even to yourself. It's the pure case, coincidence.

Q5Q: The streets that you choose to take decide how you need to act further on.

Q5A: It is the same thing: sometimes you find yourself in front of images, which you could have never thought to fully grasp. It is interesting. Me when I do research, I sometimes can't even explain to myself why certain images have an impact on me. I simply write things down, sometimes also basic mental associations, when I look at images, then I re-read my notes and I become aware if they can become something. But I trust a lot also my sensations, emotions, that stimulate certain visions, and I write. I try not to look at footage 10 hours in a row, because in my opinion it is a complex process that of absorbing images and their meaning. I see nevertheless many images, as I do also archival work also for others and not having the necessary time, I need to go fast.

Q6Q: And maybe with time and experience you have already formed your own instinct for choosing the images. Do you think that home movies are forms to fill in that acquire a completely new meaning during their reuse, or do you think there is something about home movies that remains always the same, no matter how they are being reused?

Q6A: I think both things. In my opinion I believe it is possible to create something that is very different and distant from the original context, to give them a completely new life, separate them from their origins and give them a totally new life, a new meaning. Using them for a scene of a dream, images that depict real scenes of everyday life. Then on the other hand their intrinsic value can't be taken away; and this is an added value, right? This is something that some images can have, not all of them.

Q7Q: Are there any home movie scenes of which you remained particularly fond of? Which?

Q7A: Yes, there are so many.

Q7Q: Ok, then lets make a top3 maybe.

Q7A: There are actually so many. I have found for example scenes for 'The Mouth of the Wolf' that had a very strong impact on me, images that we did not use in the film, due to the lack of a direct connection with it, but the impact of this footage was for me so strong that I decided to do a separate editing work with this material in order to be able to watch them separately. These images depicted women in Genoa, walking down the beach, young people in the university environment and so on, images which were connected with the topic of the research for the film. These images had a strong impact on me. Always for this research towards the end, beautiful images emerged, images depicting some women playing on the beach of Lavagna. These were beautiful reels which I have later in part reused in a video for the singer Vinicio Caposella. I had to make those images re-emerge, because I was so connected to them. They created an atmosphere similar to the film by Peter Weir, Pickinick in New York, an atmosphere of enchantment, the ladies which were moving with an incredible grace. For me it was above all this grace, belonging to a lost time and re-conquered by these images, which were images shot in 9.5mm, therefore images of the late 20s. Me, when I have the possibility and approach an archive, the first thing I do is asking for the oldest material they have, which is mainly 9.5mm, and for sure if we talk about home movies are the rarest/few. I start with these because 8 and super8 there is much more around. Also in the archive in Cagliari, I started with 9.5mm and 16mm, of which were few reels, and then 35mm reels, which were so many, and then 8mm and super8mm. Obviously these are more rare images, because few people could afford this type of equipment at that time, so in the contexts of high-class society. But most of the times these were also filmmakers who filmed extremely well, all the material they produced is incredible.

Q8Q: Can you think about home movie scenes you found particularly ambiguous?

Q8A: Yes, for example during the work for 'The Mouth of the Wolf', a filmmaker who I got to know gave me a filming camera and inside there was a reel of a home moviemaker who had filmed only that reel in his entire life and he had left him this material. It was entitled: the luggage. He had constructed a luggage with a hole in it, from which he filmed the prostitutes from the historical centre of Genoa city. This was all material that when I saw it – apart from the absurd story of finding this luggage with all that was inside of it and the person who invented it – seemed to me very violent, very voyeuristic and aggressive images. We used these images in the film, changing them completely, in the sense that we introduced them as movements of 'departure' in the sense that you were not walking towards the aim to uncover something, but we used them in a very abstract sense, where you were distancing yourself from the goal. We have edited the voiceover in parallel to the protagonist and we have done also a colouring work where almost everyone had become a sort of a shadow. These images have troubled me, as I felt them very violent and strong as a choice of hiding the camera and not knowing that you were actually filmed.

Q9Q: Yes, indeed very strong this concept of the imaginary of the filmmaker, his feelings. In the process of research and selection of the stories you used in your latest work 'The years', did you work instinctually or did you proceed according to a well-structured process that used specific criteria?

Q9A: I had some ideas, that until that moment had not taken the shape of a film. I wanted to do a booklet on ghosts that put together some of my engravings and photocopies. So when I started this work I had this thing in my mind. I was interested in it, I had documented it also a little. I was for sure interested in the female universe, so I focused from the start on this, and I chose the scenes that ended up also in the film. But it was an instinctive thing, in the sense that my interest at that point was lying on these topics, because it is also easy, as we were saying yesterday, there are a lot of images depicting women, as it was mostly men filming, and these type of images are extremely haunting (fantasmatici) already because of the fact that they mostly represent people who do not live anymore. So I was finding these fantastic images of women that were like swallowed by the acetate reel and transformed into shadows, they have impacted me a lot. Of course so many of my own life events influenced on that, they have impacted on the film, the editing and on my choices. Let's say that during the stay I started, not immediately, because I also wanted to discover a little the archive, understanding as an archivist the main topics. Then, during the last 2 or 3 days I worked directly towards the goal, considering that I did not have a well-defined story from the beginning. But it was very beautiful because I could imagine a 'choral narrative', not a single story but many voices. Then I discovered this book, which is a collective autobiography. This was exactly what was needed for this type of work.

Q9Q: When you went to the archive, did you approach the material by contextualising it or did you have a more free method of approaching it?

Q9A: In the beginning I asked if there were images shot by women. They said no, so I asked to be able to see the oldest material they had. As the days went on, I gave more and more precise indications, asking for more specific things, for example to see images of hands, or other details. Of course this was very hard, as if there is no catalogue with a very detailed description. But I relied much on the memory of Martina who digitalised all material and knew it very well. In general I

described the things that I was interested in, as a story and also I was looking for images that could raise further questions. It is interesting what we were saying earlier, about the images of the perfect family, but for example there is always him who films, it is always him behind, but very often he does not really see what lies before him. So there are very strange gazes that had an impact on me, there was a woman crying, another one who avoids a kiss, all these images that are very tough. For example the moment of the separation it was very hard to find those images. I have searched them for such a long time. Finding moments of conflict, is not a thing taken for granted. I had to invent them also a little by myself, through editing effects, suggesting things that were actually representing something completely different, which were maybe jokes but seemed more than that.

Q10Q: I have put together a small compilation of home movie scenes, which I would like you to see and comment if possible.

SF: Beautiful images.

Q10A: which was the one that struck you most?

Q10Q: The one where they kick the rabbits. It is something shocking because of the violence. And it also represents a world that is now very distant from ours. I mean in the past rabbits were not pets. Then again I don't know what they were actually doing.

Q10A: More of a sort of a cruel tradition that is being exhibited in front of the camera.

Q10Q: Very cruel. It reminds me a little the short film that I prepared in occasion of 90 years of Luce, where there is the end scene where children on donkeys hit the donkeys very hard.

Q10A: Very beautiful images anyways. Brief ones but very interesting. The first ones are very interesting. Then these groups are very striking where they gather in front of the camera as for a photograph, which in reality is not a still. Then there is the very sad gaze of this old lady that lasts for a very brief moment that seems a little resigned.